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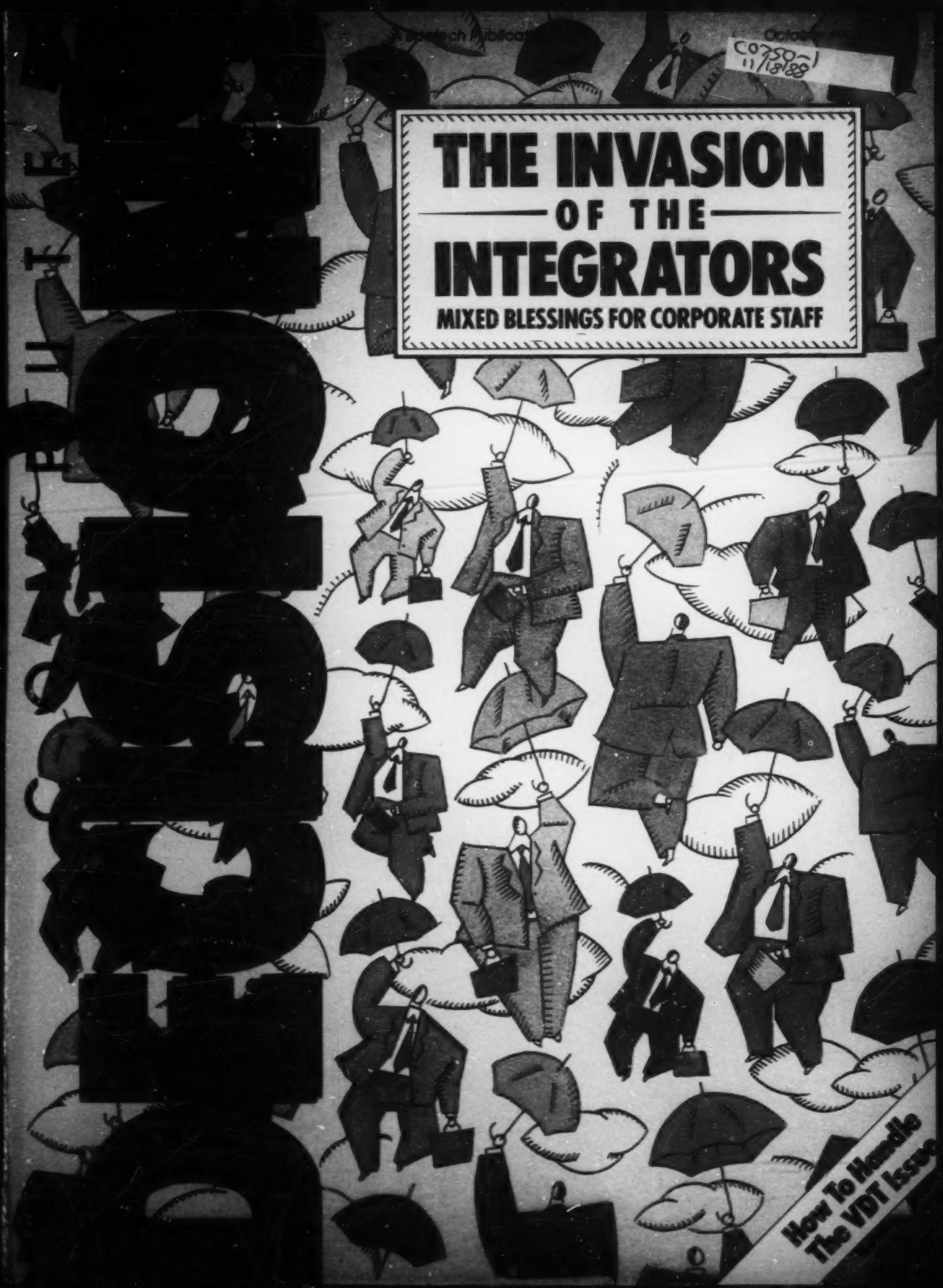
THE INVASION OF THE INTEGRATORS

MIXED BLESSINGS FOR CORPORATE STAFF



How To Handle The VDT Issue

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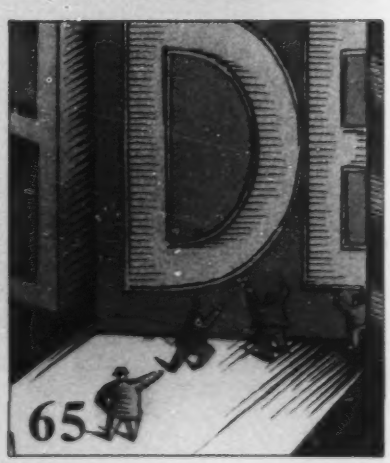

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Eyes on the Ripple Effect

When information technology makes news in the general media, the implications can be positive, negative, or occasionally neither. What commonly influences the outcome, however, is an insufficient grasp of the particular technology on the part of both the media and the intended audience. This is one reason that computers often jump from miracle machine to devil's instrument at the drop of a headline.

Any one of these situations is capable of eventually producing problems for information managers; if for no other reason, they are worth tracking. In this issue, we offer two examples of information technology treatment in the media. On page 54, you'll get the real facts on how the complex of health-related issues surrounding display terminals in the workplace was used to engender a unique and precedent setting piece of local legislation in Suffolk County, NY. On page 60, you'll get an introduction (most likely) to a computer package that aims to do what all the combined newspapers, magazines, and TV and radio stations in the United States have thus far failed to pull off: render the average American voter well informed enough to make an intelligent choice at the polls.

In both cases, I believe, the initial interpretation of these developments by those who have neither the time, the background, nor the inclination to delve fully into their technological underpinnings has paved the way for confusion and overreaction. VDTs are obviously not an insidious, malignant scourge in the workplace; neither is any computer program capable of filling a Big Brotherly void created by an apathetic electorate. That it could provide significant benefit or detriment to the fortunes of a particular candidate for public office is even more unlikely. Yet the public reaction, and the reactions to the reaction, may run a far different course than the facts would suggest. And let's not forget that this public includes our peers and top management in our own companies.

As they say in the media, stay tuned.

Robin Nelson

Cover Illustration:
Tim Lewis

open system because it must run as a guest operating system under VM. X/Open recently announced a verification suite for CAE, which will give it more force in the Unix market. Fujitsu, the first Japanese company to join X/Open, must also pledge conformance to CAE. Fujitsu's support is significant, Waxman says, because it is "important that the X/Open standard is indeed international."

IEEE is working on a suite of Unix-based facilities to establish an open operating system environment known as Posix (Portable Operating System Interface). The initial IEEE Posix group, Project 1003.1, incorporates the systems services interface standard. Originally slated for approval by June, an initial model was only recently approved. Because of the delay, an interim, less fully functional Posix standard was adopted by the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (formerly the National Bureau of Standards) as a federal information processing standard (FIPS). Posix standards are "slightly out of synch at this point," says Roger Martin, manager of the Software Engineering Group for NIST, but by spring Posix standards should be agreed on by several standards bodies, including NIST, IEEE, the American National Standards Institute, and the International Standards Organization, according to Martin. This will put Posix in the forefront of Unix standards.

Vendors of Unix products have been busy making announcements. DEC unveiled a new version of its Unix-variant operating system, Ultrix. DEC claims the new Ultrix-32 Version 3 is the first Unix variant to comply with all the major standards models. The new version complies with AT&T's System V Interface Definition (SVID), the IEEE Posix standard, the X/Open CAE, and OSF's AES. It also incorporates several of the Berkeley System Distribution (BSD) features. Ultrix-32 Version 3 features several utilities that promote interoperability. These include the VMS/Ultrix Connection and the Ultrix Mail Connection, both for interoperability between Ultrix and VMS, and DECnet-Ultrix Version 3, which promotes interoperability among disparate systems over TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) connections.

Data General Corp. (Westboro, MA) has also announced a new version of its Unix variant. DG/UX Version 4 is compatible with Unix System V Release 3, Posix, and many of the BSD features. The DG/UX kernel was rewritten for better system portability among different hardware architectures, specifically for the Motorola 88000 reduced instruction set computing chip, according to David Ellenberger, director of systems product marketing. Support for other RISC architectures may follow, he says. The new version also provides support for symmetrical multiprocessing—the ability to have multiple processors simultaneously working on multiple problems—and extensible file systems for more efficient I/O processing. DEC has announced a future implementation of symmetrical multiprocessing for Ultrix-32.

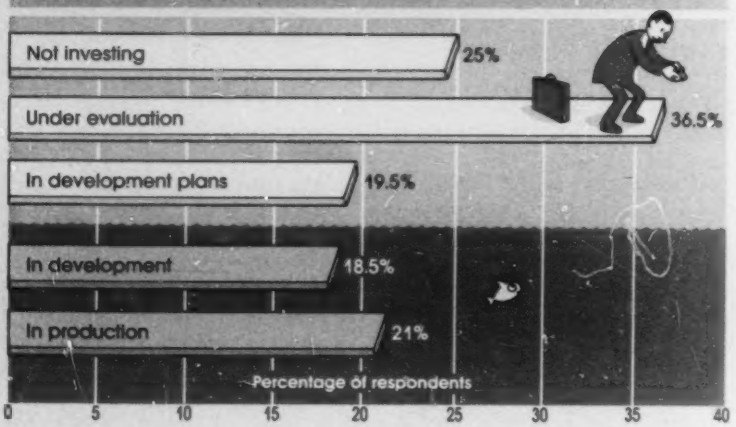
Stratus Computer (Marlboro, MA) plans to offer a version of Unix by the end of next year. The first version of Stratus's Unix will feature fault-tolerant symmetrical multiprocessing, the vendor says. Later versions will feature system optimization for online transaction processing. The Stratus Unix will be compliant with Unix V.3 and Posix.

Apple Computer Inc. (Cupertino, CA) also appears to be serious about its Unix commitment, based on statements it made about its Unix system, A/UX, at the Dallas Unix conference. Apple announced that the next version of A/UX will comply with the interim Posix FIPS, and future versions with the evolving standard.

What does all this jockeying among vendors and standards groups mean? As Data General's Ellenberger suggests, "Maybe if everybody joins everything, eventually there'll be a real Unix standard." D

DIVING INTO EXPERT SYSTEMS

Based on responses to: "Check the boxes that most accurately describe the status of expert systems in your organization." The largest percentage checked, "We are evaluating expert systems"—a level of interest that augurs a strong commitment of resources to expert systems.



Phil Scheuer

Responses may add up to more than 100 percent. Respondents were asked to check as many categories as applied to their organizations.

DECISIONS chart

Are information managers really interested in expert systems? Based on results of the latest DECISIONS/Paine Webber Survey of MIS Attitudes, the answer is yes. Nearly 40 percent of the survey's respondents indicated they had already taken the plunge into the expert-systems sea by committing resources to expert systems—either by using them in production situations or by having them in development. Another 19.5 percent indicated that they had expert-system technology factored into their future development plans. The largest single percentage of respondents indicated that they were in the process of evaluating expert systems—a response that suggests users are ready to make a headfirst dive into the technology.